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Ombudsman reports on misconduct at the NSW Police College

Ombudsman Bruce Barbour today reported to Parliament on allegations of misconduct at the NSW Police College. Following on from the recent discussion in the media, the Ombudsman report details allegations made against 30 police officers in 2002. The investigation of these allegations identified 23 officers who were found to have had sex with students. The report also provides information about more than 100 complaints made about Education Services officers since 2003.

“Most of these misconduct complaints have been properly investigated. However, the action taken against officers found to have engaged in misconduct was in many cases too little, too late”, Mr Barbour said.

Some officers have been treated leniently in past investigations because having sex with students was not clearly prohibited. The Ombudsman has emphasised the need for a clearer Code of Conduct for Police College instructors, and more consistent decision making by NSW Police.

“College instructors are in a position of trust and authority over students, and are responsible for teaching them how to become good police officers. There is a pressing need for an explicit and unambiguous Code of Conduct for police instructors. Without a clear standard against which to hold officers to account, there remains a real risk that strong action will not be available where misconduct is found,” said the Ombudsman.

The report demonstrates the ongoing need for a robust complaints system to ensure that police officers conduct themselves properly. A current proposal by NSW Police to change the complaints system and wind back the role of the Ombudsman would reduce independent scrutiny of the conduct of police officers.

“I cannot support changes to the complaints system that would compromise the ability of the Ombudsman, on behalf of the public, to hold NSW Police to account for the actions of police officers”, said Mr Barbour.

The Ombudsman will provide ongoing information to the public about police progress in acting on matters raised in the report.

The report will be available on our website after 3pm today.
<http://www.nswombudsman.nsw.gov.au/publication/specialreport.asp>